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Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

6950th meeting
Wednesday, 24 April 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gasana	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Musayev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Mrs. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Kim Sook
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bahrain, Botswana, Brazil, Djibouti, Egypt, Iceland, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in this meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, to participate international in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: Last week, the Council heard briefings that described in grim detail the tragedy unfolding inside Syria and its dramatic humanitarian consequences in the absence of a political solution that could bring about a new and democratic Syria. This is a moment of increased risk and instability across the Middle East, and there is a need for quick and concerted action to address the humanitarian situation, both inside and outside Syria. Lebanon and Jordan are on the front line and must be supported effectively.

Action must also be taken on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The fragile hope triggered by the renewed United States engagement must be sustained and translated into serious efforts on the part of the parties. The desire for peace needs to be cultivated by early measures to reverse negative trends on the ground and build trust.

Last month's visit of United States President Obama marked an important opening. Secretary Kerry's subsequent trips and continued engagement with the parties and regional leaders demonstrate a serious commitment to breaking the political deadlock. It was in support of these efforts for renewed meaningful talks that the Secretary-General met with President Obama on 11 April. The two agreed that there is at least a window of opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to resume negotiations. The Secretary-General reconfirmed the United Nations commitment to supporting, including through the Quartet, a substantive initiative with a defined political horizon to achieve a two-state solution. He spoke to the urgency of making progress towards peace.

In the margins of the Group of Eight meeting on 10 April, ministers recommitted themselves to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. They further agreed on the need for a major international effort, involving regional parties and the Quartet, to drive the peace process forward. Now is the time for the international community to work in a concerted manner and without delay. During the recent Doha Summit, Arab leaders reconfirmed their intention to send a ministerial delegation to Washington, D.C., on 28 April to discuss the peace process.

Of course, much depends on whether the parties have the political will and exercise the bold leadership required to create conditions conducive to the resumption of a political process, despite the considerable differences between them and the risk that events on the ground could overtake new efforts at engagement.

In a development of note, on 13 April President Abbas accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad. The Prime Minister is expected to continue

carrying out his functions as caretaker until a new Prime Minister is announced. The United Nations recognizes that Prime Minister Fayyad had to contend with circumstances that kept constraining the success of the statebuilding agenda he led together with President Abbas and which is now, in the absence of a credible political horizon, at serious risk. We remain committed to working with our Palestinian partners, under the leadership of President Abbas, towards statebuilding and development, and to achieving the long overdue negotiated two-State solution.

In an encouraging development Israel and Palestine, with the facilitation of several parties, reached an important agreement on 23 April at a meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board, which allows for an experts mission to the old city of Jerusalem in mid-May. The parties also agreed on the postponement of five resolutions taken by UNESCO's Executive Board. This agreement exemplifies how cooperation and dialogue can be beneficial to all Member States and also conducive to maintaining stability on the ground.

The financial viability of the Palestinian Authority remains at stake, and we continue to call for donors to step up their financial support. The budget approved by the Palestinian Cabinet on 28 March for the 2013 fiscal year reflects fiscal discipline, yet reveals the Palestinian Authority's continued and increased dependence on external aid to cover its expenditures in the short-term. The Palestinian Authority's efforts to expand its tax base and enhance collection will result in increased net revenue of $2.5 billion, and total expenditure will amount to $18 billion, more than half of which is for wages, even with the implementation of a net hiring freeze. This expenditure includes some $350 million planned for development projects, most of them to be financed externally and dedicated to rural communities in Area C. International assistance amounting to close to $1.4 billion will be required to cover the deficit. The most recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in March forecasted a worsening economic outlook for the current year, with slower growth rates than in 2012, and a growing financing gap for the new budget should foreign aid continue to decline.

The reporting period witnessed a considerable increase in Palestinian casualties, mostly as result of new clashes with Israeli security forces during Palestinians demonstrations that grew violent. On the occasion of Palestinian Prisoners Day on 17 April, some 3,000 prisoners went on hunger strike for the day and demonstrations were held in main West Bank cities, resulting in 11 Palestinians being injured by rubber-coated bullets fired by Israeli security forces. The issue of Palestinian prisoners has fueled much of the unrest, especially following the terminal illness and death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in prison on 2 April. During the clashes that ensued, Israeli security forces killed two Palestinian teenagers and injured two more with live ammunition at a checkpoint near Tulkarem after they allegedly threw Molotov cocktails at the checkpoint. The case is under investigation by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and we look forward to a timely and public announcement of its conclusion.

We welcome the resolution in the case of Samer Issawi, who has reportedly suspended his hunger strike following a court ruling on 23 April that provides he will be freed to his Jerusalem home after he serves an additional eight months. We continue to call for a swift resolution to his case based on humanitarian grounds. The United Nations remains closely involved on the ground, and the Secretary-General has urged that a solution be reached without delay in order to end the prisoners' plight and to preserve calm. We cannot but recall that other fundamental issues incorporated in the May 2012 agreement remain unresolved.

Wide demonstrations were also organized throughout the West Bank on the occasion of Land Day on 30 March, but violence was relatively contained compared to previous years. Some 22 Palestinian protesters and four Israeli soldiers were injured on that day. Protests continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We reiterate that demonstrations must remain non-violent. We also urge the Israeli security forces to show the utmost restraint and to ensure the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and freely.

In all, incursions by Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank remained at approximately the same level — a total of 303 operations compared to 186 in the previous reporting period. But the levels of violence have nearly doubled, with Israeli security operations resulting in two Palestinian teenagers dead and 724 people injured, including 352 children and six women. A total of 354 Palestinians were arrested, including a number of Hamas and Islamic jihad leaders. Thirty-five Israeli soldiers were also reportedly injured by protesters in the clashes during the period.

Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have also continued. A total of 13 Palestinians, including six children, were injured by settlers, and over 600 trees belonging to Palestinians were vandalized. On 7 April, Israeli settlers reportedly spray-painted racist slogans on the walls of two mosques in a village near Bethlehem. In two instances, Israeli security forces arrested a total of six settlers, among them a serving soldier, suspected of involvement in so-called price-tag activities. Palestinian attacks on Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank resulted in ten injuries, including one child and one woman, and extensive damage to Israeli vehicles as the result of stone-throwing.

The reporting period registered continued demolitions and related displacements in Area C and East Jerusalem. As compared to the monthly average of 50 demolitions in 2012, 29 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished between 25 March and 23 April 2013, including 16 structures demolished yesterday, leading to the displacement of 40 Palestinians.

We remain deeply troubled by the continued developments with respect to settlement activity. Let me reiterate unequivocally the consistent position of the United Nations that settlement activity violates international law. Settlement activity further undermines Palestinians' confidence in the viability of the two-State solution. The Secretary-General is particularly worried about reports suggesting that the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction has predicted the construction within a year and a half of housing units in the E1 area of the West Bank. Separately, initial approval was granted on 9 April to begin a new construction project in a settlement that is part of occupied East Jerusalem.

We are also concerned about the potentially negative impact on Palestinians of the continuing expansion of the Sderot Begin Highway through parts of the neighbourhood of Beit Safafa, occupied by the Israelis in 1967. Such actions are counterproductive to creating the right environment for peace.

The situation in Gaza has become increasingly fragile. The calm that followed the ceasefire on 21 November 2012 has been challenged, and there has been little progress on the more substantive underlying issues that formed part of that understanding. In an alarming development, over the last month, a total of 20 rockets, including three Grad rockets and four mortar shells, were fired from Gaza into Israel and towards the sea, albeit without causing injuries or damage. Explosive ordnance placed along the border fence hit an Israeli patrol, causing physical damages to the vehicles but no injuries during the reporting period. Israel conducted four incursions and two airstrikes into the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinian civilians were injured on 5 and 16 April by Israeli fire while approaching the border fence. In reaction to the shooting of rockets, Israel again closed the Kerem Shalom crossing from 8 to 11 April. Since 26 February, the crossing, which is the only passage for goods from Israel into Gaza, has been closed for 29 out of 56 days. The off-shore fishing limit has remained reduced from six to three nautical miles since 21 March, well below the 20-mile limit agreed by the Israelis and Palestinians in the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which remains in force and should be respected. The movement of Palestinians across Erez has been further restricted to humanitarian cases with special permits for several periods since 26 February.

In another development, on 17 April two Grad rockets fired from Egypt's Sinai peninsula exploded in open areas of the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat, causing no casualties or damage. The attack, claimed by the Salafist jihadist group, Mujahideen Shura Council, was the first such rocket-firing at Eilat in a year. The same group has previously claimed responsibility for rocket attacks from Gaza into Sderot on 21 March.

We continue to strongly condemn the firing of rockets into Israel. Those rockets, which are indiscriminate, are intended to sow fear and cause civilian casualties, and can trigger cycles of violence difficult to stop. We also call on Israel to act with restraint. At the same time, we remain seriously concerned about the impact of Israeli restrictions on the vulnerable civilian population in Gaza. The United Nations continues to support Egypt's efforts to fully implement the ceasefire understanding it brokered between the parties. In that regard, we continue to call for preservation of the calm, with crossings into Israel remaining open and the fishing limit line to be expanded in full implementation of the November understanding. The United Nations will also continue to work for the relief of the Gaza population, including by stepping up reconstruction efforts.

Demonstrations and sit-ins took place all over the Gaza Strip in front of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities on 4 April, protesting against cuts to its cash-assistance programme, which were necessitated

by budget shortfalls. Protests grew aggressive when a group of demonstrators entered UNRWA offices and threatened staff members, forcing UNRWA to close its offices until 9 April, thus preventing the Agency from providing necessary assistance to Palestine refugees.

Meanwhile, efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation continue. Hamas and Fatah have resumed informal working-level meetings but have not advanced in their discussions. On 2 April, Khaled Meshaal was re-elected Chief of the Hamas Political Bureau. A day earlier, President Abbas reiterated his position, in accordance with the Doha understanding of February 2012, that he was prepared to lead a technical interim Government, which would prepare for elections 90 days into its term. On 12 April the Chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC) handed a copy of the updated voter register to the Palestinian President and informed him that the CEC is technically ready to organize any election, once so decided. The voter register now includes over 1.8 million electors, both in the West Bank and Gaza, representing over 80 per cent of the total Palestinian adult population, of which 48.2 per cent are female. The CEC continues to organize the complementary municipal elections scheduled for 1 June 2013 in the West Bank.

On the Syrian Arab Republic, I will keep my remarks short, as the Security Council was already briefed in-depth only five days ago by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria. Mr. Brahimi emphasized the need for a political solution along the lines of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and warned against the growing militarization and radicalization inside Syria. He reiterated the Secretary-General's call to stop the flow of arms to either side in Syria and called on the Council to consider an arms embargo.

The Security Council also heard detailed presentations on the humanitarian and refugee situation, as well as on sexual violence and children in the context of the Syrian conflict, by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Amos, High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Bangura, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Zerrougui. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Council to hear directly about the challenges faced by the neighbouring countries most affected by the humanitarian spillover of the Syrian conflict, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, in their efforts to accommodate unprecedented flows of refugees from Syria.

As concerns the United Nations fact-finding mission to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, we are still in discussions with the Government of Syria on the scope and modalities of the mission. In line with his authority under General Assembly resolution 42/37 C and Security Council resolution 620 (1988), the Secretary-General intends to ensure that all credible allegations brought to his attention by Member States are considered and, if it is deemed necessary, investigated. The Secretary-General's position is that, at this time, the mission should investigate the allegations about incidents in Aleppo and Homs. While awaiting access to the Syrian territory, the experts of the mission are studying the information on the alleged incidents involving the use of chemical weapons provided to them by Member States. They remain ready to deploy to Syria within 24 to 48 hours following the Syrian Government's acceptance of the modality and scope of the mission.

The situation in the Golan remains unstable, with sporadic clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition continuing on a daily basis. The military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and Syria and to jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries, as has been highlighted by recent incidents. On two occasions, on 2 and 12 April, the IDF fired tank rounds and missiles in what they described as retaliation for gunfire aimed from the Bravo side at IDF patrols across the ceasefire line. Syrian authorities reported to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force that the missiles fired by the IDF on 12 April caused one fatality and injured several members of Syrian security forces.

The spillover of the conflict in Syria continues to be felt in Lebanon, particularly in northeastern border areas. On 21 April, at least seven rockets from the Syrian side fell on Lebanese soil in the villages of Dora, Aysh, Sahlat Al-Miyah and the town of Hermel, causing only material damage; no casualties were reported. The Lebanese Armed Forces deployed heavily in the area. In a statement, President Sleiman denounced the missile attacks on Lebanon and stressed Lebanon's role in hosting Syrian refugees. He stated that Lebanon is working on controlling the border in accordance with the Baabda Declaration, and that the Army and relevant authorities were instructed to take measures

to prevent attacks on Lebanon and protect the safety of its citizens. There were reports of three further airstrikes on Lebanese territory on 3, 4 and 11 April by Syrian military aircraft, none of which caused injury. On 8 April, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry raised the issue of the violations of Lebanese sovereignty to the Syrian authorities. On 14 April, two Lebanese civilians were killed and two injured in shelling from across the border in Syria. I take this opportunity to reiterate the concern of the United Nations that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon should be fully respected by all parties.

On 6 April, President Sleiman designated Tamam Salam the next Prime Minister, following the resignation of Prime Minister Mikati last month. Mr. Salam, whose designation received near-unanimous parliamentary support, has stated that he will form a Government to hold parliamentary elections and that he is in consultations with the parties regarding the character and composition of his future cabinet. It is critical that Lebanese leaders use this opportunity to continue to engage positively to ensure the early formation of a Government. The Secretary-General also calls on all Lebanese parties to respect President Sleiman's wise and courageous disassociation policy, designed to help protect Lebanon from spillover from Syria. The Secretary-General, concerned about reports that there are Lebanese fighting in Syria, both on the side of the regime and the side of the opposition, hopes the new Government will find ways to promote better compliance with the disassociation policy by all sides in Lebanon.

On 6 April, President Sleiman signed a decree postponing the parliamentary elections by one week to 16 June. On 10 April, Parliament voted to amend the current election law, suspending the candidate registration process until 19 May, so as to give the parties a longer period in which to agree on a new electoral framework. I echo Council members' call for swift progress to be made in ensuring speedy agreement on the electoral law, so that timely parliamentary elections take place on a consensual basis within the legal and constitutional framework.

Meanwhile, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and along the Blue Line has remained generally calm. Twice this month, President Sleiman publicly condemned Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace as breaches of resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, allow me to make the following observations. As the situation inside Syria continues to deteriorate, it is more vital than ever that everyone collectively works towards preserving regional stability. Advancing the Middle East peace process remains central to ensuring that the region is not at further risk of destabilization. Let me repeat what the Secretary-General has stated at every opportunity: there is now an opening to develop a meaningful initiative to achieve the negotiated two-State solution that will best serve the interests, rights and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. But it is not an overstatement to suggest that we are about to reach a critical point in the viability of the peace process. Whether that prospect solidifies or vanishes will depend on the direction that leaders on both sides choose to take, and on the level of regional and international support for new efforts.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas have reiterated the right commitments. The choice ultimately rests in their hands not to disappoint their people and to offer them, at last, real prospects for peace and security. The international community also bears a unique responsibility to help them move forward together. The United Nations welcomes the renewed attention that the United States is giving to the peace process. We stand ready to contribute to a return to meaningful negotiations in the period ahead, including through the Quartet and through broader engagement with all relevant partners. Despite the difficult regional context and the challenges on the ground between Israel and Palestine, we believe that this is a moment of opportunity that we cannot afford to lose.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Mr. President, I am honoured to address the Security Council today, and I congratulate you and your friendly country Rwanda on your presidency and skilled leadership. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Russian Federation for its leadership of the Council in March. And I thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the region.

We are already four months into this year and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the territory that constitutes the State of Palestine — remains precarious, as the political

impasse persists and conditions on the ground continue to worsen. While many, in speaking of that impasse, have referred to the status quo and its unsustainability, we must face reality. There is no status quo. The situation has in fact never ceased to change, and regrettably not for the better.

Israel continues to pursue illegal policies aimed at altering the demography, character and geographic nature of the territory, directly endangering the viability and the very possibility of a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. That is being done systematically and deliberately, in grave breach of international law. As land confiscations, settlement construction and human rights violations continue, the prospects for achieving that solution are diminishing. At the same time, the belief that peace can soon be realized is also diminishing, as expressed in growing Palestinian civilian protests against the occupation. Israel's violent suppression of peaceful protests continues to cause casualties, further aggravating the situation, as do ongoing Israeli settler terror and havoc against Palestinian civilians and their land.

The combination is highly toxic and requires immediate remedy. Urgent action is needed to salvage the prospects for achieving a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – based on the long-standing parameters that are well known to everyone in the Chamber, parameters that form the foundation of the two-State solution and the essence of a historic compromise, which the Palestinian leadership has committed itself to and the international community widely supports. With each passing day, an opportunity is lost to reverse the damage done by Israel's nearly 46-year military occupation and to instead promote genuine peace, security and coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

The Palestinian leadership has therefore welcomed recent efforts by concerned parties to revive the path of peace, including the important visit of United States President Barack Obama to the region in March. We welcome the priority accorded to resolving the conflict, the renewed commitment to a just peace and the efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to progress. We have repeatedly proven, in word and deed, our commitment to finding a political path forward for the achievement of peace. We have thus sincerely engaged in follow-up meetings with United States Secretary of State John Kerry, as well as meetings with the Arab ministerial follow-up committee, including at the Arab Summit in Doha. In that regard, the Arab commitment to peace, reaffirmed for over a decade in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, is unquestionable.

Yet, we know that intention alone cannot overcome the serious obstacles posed by Israel, the occupying Power, which have repeatedly undermined and actually sabotaged past efforts for peace. We thus believe the following elements are imperative for facilitating a meaningful political process and the success of any forthcoming initiative. Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, must cease. That would constitute a serious signal from Israel that it is ready to negotiate in good faith an end to the occupation. There is a global consensus on the illegality of Israel's settlement campaign. Moreover, everyone is in agreement — colonization, expansionism and annexation are entirely incompatible with ending occupation and making peace.

Israel's leaders must realize that peace cannot just be spoken of from lofty podiums to appease the international community, while the occupation continues to be entrenched. They must demonstrate they are ready for peace and act to make it a reality. That requires a halt to all settlement activities and acceptance of the principle of withdrawal from the lands forcibly seized in 1967, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Accordingly, Israel must also accept the global consensus that negotiations begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and that only by negotiation can that border be adjusted between the two sides. Those steps would contribute to diffusing the situation, building the necessary trust and fostering the appropriate atmosphere for the launch of negotiations.

A further imperative is the release of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in conformity with prior agreements and consistent with international law and humanitarian principles. As indicated in our letters to the President of the Council in past months, their plight remains a priority for the Palestinian people and their leadership, with 17 April recently commemorated as "Prisoners Day". Sensitivities surrounding that issue are high, not least because of the illegality of their capture and the occupying Power's inhumane treatment.

Currently, 4,900 Palestinians are in Israeli captivity, among them are 235 children, 1,200 persons needing urgent medical treatment and 168 persons held under administrative detention without charge or trial.

Dozens more Palestinians continue to be arrested and detained every week in Israeli military raids throughout the country. The brutality of their imprisonment has drastically raised tensions, particularly following the torture killing of Arafat Jaradat in detention in February and the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh due to medical neglect last month, prompting widespread civilian protests.

Likewise, the plight of Samer Issawi, whose hunger strike has lasted for over 260 days in protest of his re-arrest and detention without charge, has galvanized Palestinian sentiments and remains of high concern. We salute from this podium Issawi's courage, victory and brave resilience in demanding his freedom and the resilience of all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. While noting yesterday's positive developments in the case of Issawi, we reiterate our appeal to the Secretary-General and all concerned members of the international community, including the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States as the other members of the Quartet, to continue their efforts to compel Israel to release Issawi. He and all other Palestinian prisoners and detainees should be released and returned to their families and communities and not be exiled from Palestine.

Also, we reiterate our call for an end to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continues to debilitate and disfigure the Palestinian society, inflicting severe socioeconomic and humanitarian hardship, isolation and repression on our people, as recently highlighted by the humanitarian coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory and others. While recognizing the global financial crisis affecting all, that blockade is totally obstructing Palestinian economic subsistence and must end. It is an unjust situation for our people to bear, as well as for the donor community, which is constantly asked to pay the price for Israel's illegal occupation measures.

Partial or temporary remedies will not help; all of those critical issues require a political solution. As stated at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, convened in March 2013, by Norway's Minister for Foreign Affairs, efforts to solve Palestine's acute economic problems are essential, but will only be meaningful within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution. That is true of all the problems and crises that persist and are symptoms of the larger problem: the continuation of the conflict and the absence of a just solution.

The basis for that solution is clear and present in the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. What is needed is the political will to take action on that basis in order to overcome the prevailing obstacles and to advance serious negotiations so as to resolve all core issues within a set time frame. For that to happen, Israel cannot continue to be absolved of its legal obligations. It must be held accountable. The tangible efforts of the international community to compel Israel to abide by the law are long overdue and should not be considered optional. They are vital to stabilizing the situation and to giving peace a chance. The political impasse is unsustainable. Efforts to simply manage the conflict are unacceptable, as evidenced by the mounting pressure and protests in the occupied Palestinian territory against the backdrop of instability in the region.

We strongly hope that Secretary of State Kerry succeeds in his efforts, along with other regional and international partners, to launch a credible peace process. Those efforts must include the Security Council. The Council cannot remain passively on the sidelines, abdicating its responsibilities vis-à-vis the achievement of a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of peace and security in our region. Furthermore, in that context, we support the efforts of the Arab ministerial delegation that will soon visit various capitals, including Washington, D.C., with the aim of promoting a political horizon.

For our part, I once again in this Chamber reaffirm the commitment of the Palestinian leadership to a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution. However, I must stress that at the core of that commitment is our obligation to preserve the dignity of the Palestinian people and to ensure justice for them. Essential to that is the fulfilment of their national aspirations and rights, including the right of our refugees to return and the right to self-determination in our independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Before concluding, I wish to refer to two additional issues. On the internal Palestinian front, we continue to strive for an end to the political division. Active efforts are being made, under the leadership of President Abbas with regional support, to achieve reconciliation. We are grateful for the international community's

support of unity, which is a national interest of the Palestinian people and which we hope can soon be realized. Furthermore, we are hopeful that elections can soon take place in continuation of the democratic path that we have chosen. In that regard, although Prime Minister Fayyad has resigned, while commending him for his laudable and serious work at the helm of the Government over the past years, we wish to reassure the international community and to ask for its support as we undergo that transition.

Today, I must also express our grave concerns about the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Syria. As has been made clear in briefings over the past week, the violent conflict raging there continues to claim many civilian lives, including those of Palestinian refugees, hundreds of thousands of whom have fled Syria, again suffering displacement. That crisis underscores the ongoing plight of the Palestinian refugees and the need for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, as well as the urgency of a political solution to the tragic conflict in Syria. We appeal to the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Before I begin, I would like to extend our condolences to the people of France following yesterday's bombing of its embassy in Libya. We also extend our condolences to the American people following the attack in Boston last week. Our prayers are with the victims, families and citizens of both countries.

I want to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador Eugène-Richard Gasana and the delegation of Rwanda on their leadership of the Security Council this month.

Last Tuesday, the State of Israel marked 65 years as the free and independent homeland of the Jewish people. On that historic day, six and a half decades ago, the leaders of the new Jewish State issued a declaration of independence. It affirmed:

> "We offer peace and unity to all the neighbouring States and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all."

Israel wants peace. Not a day has gone by in the past 65 years on which the people of Israel have not yearned for peace. Last month, during his visit to Israel, President Obama said "I know Israel has taken risks for peace. ... I believe that the Israeli people do want peace".

The Jewish tradition teaches that the world is sustained on three pillars: truth, justice and peace. Today, I would like to speak about the three pillars upon which a true and lasting peace in our region must stand. Those pillars of peace are the foundation that must remain standing in the shifting sands of the Middle East. Anything less would be a peace based on illusions and delusions that is bound to crumble.

The first pillar is that peace must be built on a foundation of education for tolerance and coexistence. Peace should be fostered in homes, taught in schools, nourished by leaders and woven into the very fabric of society. The Charter of the United Nations urges nations to "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours".

It does not take an urban planner to realize that the Palestinians are missing the blueprints to build a peaceful neighbourhood. From cradles to kindergarten classrooms and from the fields of summer camps to the fields of football stadiums, messages of intolerance fill Palestinian society.

Under the Palestinian Authority, students learn history from textbooks that glorify terrorists. They learn geography from atlases that erase Israel from the map. Gaza kindergarten graduations feature terrorist dress-up. Five-year-old children stage plays that glorify jihadists and suicide bombers. Instead of learning their ABCs, Palestinian children are being taught hate.

Flip through the channels of Palestinian Authority television and one might find a children's programme featuring a young girl reciting a poem that calls Jews "Allah's enemies, the sons of pigs [who] rap[e] women in city squares". Apparently, that is what passes for "educational television" under the Palestinian Authority.

How can we expect children in Gaza to learn tolerance when their own leaders repress them day in and day out? Hamas has banned co-education, arrested women for riding bicycles and prohibited women from appearing in public with their hair uncovered. Earlier this month, the Hamas police pulled dozens of young men off the streets and brutally beat them for the so-called "offence" of wearing trousers that were too

tight. I would say that that is taking the phrase "fashion police" to a completely new level.

Month after month, the Council meets to discuss what is wrong in the Middle East. Where are the concerned voices in that debate for all the hate being taught to Palestinian children? Where are the cries denouncing the incitement that poisons the wells of peace?

The second pillar is that peace must be built on a clear recognition that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people. Since King David laid the cornerstone of a palace in Jerusalem 3,000 years ago, Jews have lived continuously in the land of Israel. They saw the rise and fall of the Babylonian and Roman Empires. They endured crusades and pogroms until the the Jewish State was re-established.

I have said it before and I will say it again — Israel is committed to two States for two peoples. In 1947, we readily accepted the United Nations plan to create two States in the region, an Arab State and a Jewish State. At the time, Arab leaders rejected the existence of a Jewish State. Sixty-five years later, one still never hears Palestinian leaders speak about two States for two peoples.

While President Abbas claims to march steadily towards peace, his actions fail to fall in step. Last November, the Palestinian Authority built a monument in a central square in Bethlehem depicting the boundaries of a Palestinian State. That State extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Israel was literally wiped off the map. Conveniently enough — surprise, surprise — when foreign dignitaries visit Bethlehem, the monument is removed from its position and taken in for so-called repairs. As the old saying goes, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time".

The Observer of the State of Palestine just now cited things about Norway's aid to the Palestinian Authority. Surprisingly enough, according to Norway's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Palestinian Authority misled Oslo when it claimed Norwegian aid money had not been used to provide salaries for convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons. The Palestinian Authority has been using those types of underhanded tactics to funnel money to convicted murderers with blood on their hands. Last year, as the Palestinian Authority was threatening to delay paying its civil servants, it somehow managed to find the funds to triple — to triple — the monthly payment to terrorists.

So while President Abbas speaks about peace, he continues to publicly embrace Hamas. Abbas recently renewed his efforts to create a unity deal with Hamas, a terrorist organization dedicated to Israel's destruction. In an interview last month with the Russian network RT, Abbas went so far as to say that he did not see much difference between the policies of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Let me remind Mr. Abbas of a simple truth. Hamas and its extremist ideology are the enemies of peace. Their ideas do not empower Palestinians to build a brighter future; they enslave them in a darkened past. There will be no peace until our neighbours recognize Israel as a Jewish State that is here to stay.

Pillar number three holds that peace must be built on security. At present, the cities and communities of southern Israel remain under fire from terrorists in Gaza, despite the fact that there has not been a single Israeli settlement in Gaza since 2005. After 10 years and more than 12,000 rockets, the Security Council has not said one word to condemn the perpetrators. Israeli citizens want real assurances for their security. The situation in Gaza provides us with a valuable lesson concerning any future arrangement in the West Bank.

As rockets are flying out of Gaza, new and more sophisticated weapons are flowing in. Just this month, security forces detained a vessel off the southern coast of the Sinai peninsula carrying 60,000 rifles, RPG launchers, machine guns, hand grenades and ammunition. Ships like those routinely smuggle arms to Gaza and to Sinai-based terrorist groups.

It is no secret that Iran is the primary supplier of weapons and the greatest sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. Yet earlier this month, the representative of Iran stood in front of the General Assembly to share Iran's so-called concerns with the Arms Trade Treaty. He had the audacity to say that the transfer of arms to the Middle East has gravely affected the security and welfare of the people of this region and led to many lost lives in recent years (see A/67/PV.71). That is quite an interesting statement to hear from a representative of Iran. It is like the Mafia complaining that the crime rate in New York is too high.

The Iranian regime spins lies almost as quickly as it is spinning centrifuges. The ayatollahs are threatening to combine their extremist ideology with missiles and

nuclear weapons. Make no mistake — Iran's ambition for nuclear weapons is the single greatest threat to the Middle East and the entire world.

The Iranian nuclear programme continues to advance at the speed of an express train. The international community's efforts to stop it are moving at the pace of a local train, pausing at every stop for some nations to get off and others to get on. Last month, there was yet another round of negotiations to reason with Iran and convince it to abandon its nuclear programme. Just days after negotiations ended, Iran announced two key infrastructure projects. Surprise, surprise — both of them expanded Iran's ability to process uranium.

At the same time that Iran is advancing its nuclear ambitions, it is providing guidance to Bashar Al-Assad to increasingly effectively butcher the Syrian people. As we speak, Iran is sending Hizbullah fighters to Syria to help execute their bloody plans on the ground.

In Lebanon, Hizbullah is building an army equipped with 50,000 missiles — more than many NATO members possess. They may now have access to one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world. Hizbullah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, claims that he needs such an army to defend Lebanon against Israel. The truth is that Nasrallah wants an army to more effectively butcher his Arab brothers and sisters.

Hizbullah does not feel the need to limit its brand of terrorism exclusively to the Middle East. Last month, a court in Cyprus jailed a member of Hizbullah for planning terrorist attacks against civilians. Yet that still is not enough for some European Union members to call Hizbullah what it is — a terrorist organization. It operates with impunity on European soil, yet some European lawmakers continue to insist it is a social services organization. It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to understand the obvious facts of the case.

The foregoing are just some of the threats Israel faces in the region. Any peace agreement must be based on reassurances for the security and safety of the citizens of the world's only Jewish State.

Since Israel was born 65 years ago, we have been forced to fight six wars in six decades to defend our very existence. We know peace comes at a price. We want peace, but not at any cost. We will not turn a blind eye in the face of the threats that surround us. Now is the time to put aside the distracting sideshows of the debate and focus on how we can lay the foundation for a genuine, lasting peace. It is naive to think that peace can come from grand statements and vague promises. It would be like trying to build a new house on a shaky foundation — the whole structure is at risk of collapsing.

For all those who believed that the so-called Arab Spring would result in the blossoming of a new Middle East, take note — democracy has not taken root. Instead, what we have seen is more bloodshed and more violence. To truly establish peace, we must build a structure that can withstand the rough winds of change that are sweeping the region.

Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us." The architecture of peace has never been clearer. As we face historic challenges in the Middle East, it has never been more important to strengthen the pillars of tolerance, mutual recognition and security. Those are the blueprints that need to be followed by Israelis and Palestinians, and indeed by all people in the Middle East, if we are to live in peace, security and prosperity.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

We are witnessing a rapid deterioration in an already devastating situation in Syria, where at least 70,000 Syrians have been killed and millions displaced. The Syrian people continue to face deplorable attacks and massacres by regime forces, including the use of heavy weapons, aircraft and ballistic missiles.

We are outraged by horrific reports that hundreds of Syrians were killed over the weekend in the Damascus suburb of Jdeidet Al-Fadel. Those actions dramatize the Al-Assad regime's complete disregard for the lives of Syria's citizens, including its children. There must be full accountability for those crimes, and we urge the Syrian authorities to permit free and unfettered access to the commission of inquiry to investigate atrocities, as called for by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

The exponential surge in the number of refugees is among the clearest signs of this dire situation. More than 400,000 Syrians have fled in the last seven weeks alone, and Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and United Nations humanitarian agencies are approaching a saturation point. We applaud the generosity of the Governments and peoples that are hosting that exploding number

of refugees. We count on all of Syria's neighbours to continue to keep their borders open so that those fleeing the conflict can find safety. We call on all countries to fulfil their commitments to the United Nations Syria appeals and to consider what more they can do as the United Nations prepares to launch a new appeal next month.

We are deeply grateful to the Government of Kuwait for having fulfilled its generous contribution of $300 million to United Nations agencies and other international organizations.

The United States is providing more than $409 million in humanitarian assistance to meet health, water, sanitation and hygiene needs. We are also providing food aid, including enough wheat to provide a four-month supply of flour to more than 1 million people.

We commend the Syrian opposition coalition for its bold declaration of principles in Istanbul last weekend highlighting its commitment to protect the rights and interests of minorities, reject extremism, seek a political solution to the conflict, prevent the use or transfer of chemical weapons and preserve State institutions.

Secretary of State Kerry underscored the firm support of the United States for the coalition's commitment to a political solution of an inclusive, tolerant vision for Syria by announcing the doubling of our non-lethal support to the Syrian opposition to $250 million, to assist local opposition councils in building the capacity of civilian activists and link Syrian citizens with the Syrian opposition coalition and local coordinating councils.

We continue to support a negotiated solution to the conflict based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). We remain in close consultation with a number of countries to consider what more we can do to change Al-Assad's calculus and facilitate an orderly end to the conflict. We urge Member States to press the Al-Assad regime to commit to credible negotiations based on the framework agreed in Geneva, which calls for Al-Assad to transfer his full executive authority to a transitional governing body.

The presence of violent extremists in Syria, including the al-Nusra Front, and the dangers posed by chemical weapons are very real and deeply concerning. The Syrian people recognize the threat that Al-Qaida-linked extremists pose to their revolution, a revolution that otherwise stands for dignity and respect for human rights. They have been clear that foreign extremist ideology is not compatible with the democratic and inclusive vision for Syria for which many brave Syrians are fighting and dying.

We support the Secretary-General's efforts to investigate any and all credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Having explicitly requested a United Nations investigation, the Syrian authorities should give the team that the Secretary-General has assembled full and unfettered access so as to enable it to conduct its work comprehensively.

As the Council has long recognized, the conflict in Syria threatens the stability of its neighbours, particularly Lebanon, as demonstrated by the recent attacks in Hermel and Al-Qasr. Hizbullah not only continues to undermine Lebanon from within by violating the Government's policy of disassociation, but actively enables Al-Assad to wage war on the Syrian people by providing money, weapons and expertise to the regime, in close coordination with Iran.

The United States strongly supports Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and stability. We appreciate President Michel Sleiman's leadership during this turbulent period. We congratulate Tamam Salam as Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate. That nomination is a positive first step towards forming a new Government, a process that must remain Lebanese-led. We encourage Lebanon's leaders to adhere to the legal and constitutional framework for holding timely parliamentary elections.

Turning to Middle East peace, President Obama's trip to the region has led to a series of constructive talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The United States remains committed to trying to bring both sides back to direct negotiations, and our conversations have focused on crating the necessary climate.

The parties have agreed to engage in new efforts to promote economic development for the Palestinian people by removing some of the barriers to commerce in the West Bank and expanding private-sector investment in the West Bank. That is no substitute for serious negotiations, but we hope that those measures will increase the chances for successful talks.

The United States will work closely with both Israeli and Palestinian officials and Quartet representative Tony Blair to help move the process forward.

As President Obama said in Jerusalem, despite the evident challenges, "Peace is necessary, peace is just, and peace is possible". The United States will continue to support the Palestinian people and their efforts to build the foundations of a future State. We have recently provided $695.7 million in assistance, including $200 million in budget support to the Palestinian Authority. The United States remains the largest bilateral donor to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, providing more than $233 million in fiscal year 2012 and $113 million thus far in fiscal year 2013.

We continue to support Palestinian aspirations to the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian State. We look to the Palestinian Authority to sustain its work, revitalize the Palestinian economy and reform institutions to better serve the Palestinian people.

We must all reinvigorate our common pursuit of a two-State solution and comprehensive peace, recognizing that, of course, challenges remain. Rockets launched by extremists from Gaza and the Sinai into Israel continue to undermine those efforts and threaten the safety and security of ordinary Israeli citizens. As President Obama made very clear in his recent remarks to both Israelis and Palestinians, we all know how tensions and provocations on the ground can escalate and damage efforts to achieve a two-State solution. We urge leaders to refrain from provocations that complicate the resumption of peace negotiations and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

Progress towards peace is urgently needed, not only for Israelis and Palestinians but across the region and the world. That goal remains at the core of our efforts.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank Mr. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour; and the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Ron Prosor, for their statements.

This spring, the Middle East has been racked by two crises that require an urgent response on the part of the international community.

First, the urgency of the question of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been emphasized on numerous occasions and is based on the threat that the issue poses to the two-State solution, which is clearly the only fair and potentially lasting way to settle that conflict. We naturally welcome the fact that the United States shares that sense of urgency and has responded, and we are resolved to support their efforts to bring about a resumption of the peace process. We hope that that will result in the two parties returning to direct negotiations without preconditions and on a credible basis, with a view to reaching a lasting settlement addressing the full range of final status issues. Creating a viable political environment for such negotiations will include adopting confidence-building measures that will make it possible to end the cycle of distrust between the parties and prove to their peoples that a better future is possible through negotiation.

In that regard, we are concerned about the situation of Palestinian prisoners and the tensions that have resulted. Beyond the humanitarian aspect, which the Israeli authorities must be aware of and which should compel them to take speedy and appropriate measures, we call on them to respect the full range of their international obligations concerning Palestinian detainees, regardless of their status. Equally, Palestine's economic development must be encouraged, a task that the former Prime Minister, Mr. Salam Fayyad, particularly devoted himself to, and we have commended his decisive actions aimed at building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State. We attach great importance to the continuation of such good governance practices aimed at strengthening the Palestinian State's credibility, which have brought it the recognition and trust of the international community. It should therefore be possible to go beyond the project stage and promote development in Zone C for the benefit of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, ending the activities aimed at demolition and confiscation is clearly a humanitarian imperative, and we greatly regret the 16 demolitions that took place in the course of a single day only yesterday, as reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities. Furthermore, nothing can be achieved without the parties' willingness to work towards advancing genuine peace. We welcome the responsible attitude shown by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and by their statement supporting a two-State solution. That statement must be backed by actions: unilateral measures, particularly settlement activities, which are ongoing and violate international law, undermine prospects for peace and must therefore be stopped. As for the Palestinian Authority, we expect to see it make constructive use of its new status here at the United Nations. In connection with the prospect of a two-State solution, the issue of Palestinian unity remains a matter

of concern. We support President Abbas's efforts and call on regional actors to support them so that progress towards reconciliation under his authority can be made, and in keeping with international commitments made by the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Changing Israeli policy with regard to the Gaza Strip and ending the blockade are also prerequisites for progress in that regard. Such changes will strengthen those who support peace on behalf of a population that today ruled exclusively by Hamas. At the same time, of course, we need to bear in mind Israel's security requirements; we continue to condemn the rockets being fired on Israel and call for strict compliance with the truce.

I would once again like to reiterate France's readiness to contribute to a lasting solution, particularly in cooperation with our European partners. That faint hope must be nourished by the jointly agreed support of the international community, particularly on the part of regional actors, who must be involved in the quest for a solution in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative.

In Syria, it is difficult to detect any glimmer of hope. We heard only recently about hundreds of civilians, women and children, who were massacred by the regime and its militias in the Jdeidet Al-Fadel area. Four and a half million Syrians have now been displaced; one and a half million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The human scale of the crisis now stands at some 100,000 dead, the majority of them civilians, as well as tens of thousands who have disappeared. The question therefore arises as to when the Security Council is going to take the measures necessary to put an end to the suffering. We know what those measures are, as we have tried to get them adopted in this forum.

The first of them would be to refer the issue to the International Criminal Court in order to put on trial the war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated in Syria, for which the responsibility falls first and foremost on the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Secondly, we should exert increased humanitarian pressure with a view to ending the indiscriminate violence being inflicted on civilians, such as the bombing of civilian districts by the regime so as to enable access for all those in need by ensuring cross-border access for humanitarian assistance and authorize competent non-governmental organizations to provide such assistance. The Security Council's message regarding those issues has, however, remained inadequate. Such assistance is essential to containing the flow of refugees, who are putting intolerable pressure on neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan and Lebanon, and thereby undermining the already compromised stability of those countries. We can only continue to commend their efforts to ensure that the borders remain open. We must listen to Mr. Guterres's pleas for the international community to mobilize and lend its support to the host countries; similarly, donors must also mobilize to rapidly make good on the pledges of aid made at the Kuwait Conference.

However, what is necessary, first and foremost, is a political transition that clearly marks a break with the past and responds to the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations to choose their own destiny in a democratic manner. In order to accomplish that, we have the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and the necessary clarifications that have been made by the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, in addressing the Council. Above all, we must ensure that presidential powers are transferred in full to a transitional Government. That is the sequence of events that can lead to the establishment of a transitional Government, with full executive powers and able to organize elections, a Government that we are prepared to work with in order to do what has to be done.

Unfortunately, we have not yet reached that stage; only last week President Al-Assad reiterated his rejection of it in a statement that ignores the reality of the Syrian crisis. The only glimmer of hope is to be found with the opposition, which we continue to support. As the result of a bold initiative by Mr. Moaz Al-Khateeb, which we commended, the coalition has recognized the principle of political transition and is committed to it, as was stated in Istanbul. We call on the international community to back that initiative, in order to give support to the only force that is ready to prepare the way for political transition. We sought a viable interlocutor, and now we have one, recognized by the Arab League and a majority of the international community; one engaged in establishing a Government that seeks to unite the various components of Syrian society. Such an actor is indispensable to the creation of the conditions for a political transition, and we in the United Nations must also take that into account.

Before concluding, I would like to touch on Lebanon, which is caught in the middle of this storm. We welcome the efforts adopted by the Lebanese

Government, under President Sleiman, to implement the so-called disassociation policy, the only policy that can protect Lebanon from relapsing into civil war. While events on the border continue to increase in number and violations by Syria of Lebanon's borders are growing, we appeal to the Lebanese people to continue to uphold the principles agreed on in the Baabda Declaration, in the interests of their country's stability. We welcome the fact that agreement was rapidly reached on nominating Mr. Tamam Salam as Prime Minister, as well as the efforts to ensure a speedy agreement on the composition of the new Government, and the organization of parliamentary elections on a consensus-based approach and within the constitutional time frame.

In conclusion, this is a region that is on the brink of disaster as a result of the Syrian crisis, as a result of the burden represented by the refugees, which is creating sociopolitical problems, and the problem of radical terrorism, which is spreading, as we feared, over the slaughterhouse that Syria has become. We cannot afford to ignore this region, which is strategically so crucial to global peace and security and which will, without our prompt action, spiral into a chaos that will spill over beyond the Middle East. We face a choice: either we support the resolute action of the international community by backing the United States in ensuring that the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians can move forward and produce a lasting settlement, or we do not. We must display similar enthusiasm in tackling the Syrian situation in our search for a political transition, an enthusiasm that we have so far failed to display, thus allowing the region to plunge ever more deeply into the abyss.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I would to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

Luxembourg fully associates itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union during this debate.

First, I would like to address the peace process in the Middle East. Today, we have an opportunity to develop a serious political initiative to achieve a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Recent visits to the region by President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry are important milestones in the relaunching of the peace process. It is crucial that, for the sake of Israelis and Palestinians alike, both parties now make a genuine commitment to overcoming the stalemate, resuming negotiations and developing an action plan with a clear timetable. There is an urgent need to move forward. In the current context, doing nothing is tantamount to regressing.

Recent remarks by Israeli authorities reiterating their commitment to the two-State solution are a first step in the right direction. The new Israeli Government must now translate those words into action and adopt measures conducive to the resumption of talks by stopping all settlement activity and respecting the agreements reached with the Palestinians.

Luxembourg is indeed deeply concerned by the settlement policy. We deplore the initial authorization, granted at the beginning of April, for a new construction project, the pursuit of existing settlement projects and the demolition of Palestinian infrastructure. We also deplore the statements made last week by some members of the new Israeli Government in support of efforts to strengthen the settlements, including in the E-1 sector.

No one in Palestine will believe that the peace efforts can succeed if settlement activities continue, if the blockade of Gaza continues, if the construction of settler roads increases, if the wall of separation continues to tear Palestinians from their lands, and if administrative detentions continue. Such illegal actions only exacerbate tensions and suffering and undermine confidence in the future of the peace process. It must be emphasized that such actions are contrary to the vision of two States coexisting in peace and security.

Palestinians, too, must of course create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks by meeting their commitments, observing the Quartet principles and continuing their efforts to combat terrorism. We condemn, in this context, the rocket fire of recent weeks that has targeted civilians in southern Israel. Nothing justifies violence. Those attacks are unacceptable.

It is with regret that we learned of the resignation of Mr. Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister of Palestine. We take this opportunity to thank him for his service to his people in that difficult position, particularly with regard to the establishment and strengthening of Palestinian State institutions. It is important that his work be continued at this crucial time for the peace process.

Indeed, 2013 will be a decisive year. It is no longer time to listen, or even to talk. It is time for action, and, for

the umpteenth time, we must avoid giving rise to bitter disappointment and the anger and violence that follow. With its partners in the European Union, Luxembourg is ready to actively contribute to the efforts to revive the peace process, in close cooperation with key actors, the Quartet and the countries of the region.

I now turn to Syria. While the situation is worsening by the day, words can no longer describe the horrors experienced by the Syrian people, including the use of missiles and cluster munitions, torture, sexual violence and the recruitment of children for military aims. It would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all the crimes committed on a daily basis. Like others, we are gravely concerned by the possible use of chemical weapons. It is urgent that the commission of inquiry set up by the Secretary-General be able to visit Syria and given full access in order to shed light on all the credible allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

The list of crimes condemned by human conscience, unfortunately, grows ever longer. Those crimes must not go unpunished. We said it in January, and we repeat it today forcefully — in the absence of a credible process of accountability at the national level, a referral to the International Criminal Court is essential.

The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos, told the Council last week (see S/PV.6949) that Syria is nearing the breaking point — the point of no return. Syria is collapsing. It is therefore urgent for the Security Council to act before it is too late.

This past Thursday, the Council was able to take a first step in agreeing on a message calling for the lifting of restrictions on humanitarian access and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid across borders. It is absolutely unacceptable that the work of United Nations agencies in Syria should be hindered and that humanitarian convoys should be the target of attacks. All parties to the conflict must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including access for humanitarian and medical personnel and the protection of humanitarian workers.

At the same time, the Council called on all parties to the conflict to cease armed violence and stressed the need for a political process leading to a political transition on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). That message was a first step; we must now go further. If we want the Council to fulfil its primary responsibility under the Charter, we must overcome our divisions and work to bring the parties back into dialogue as soon as possible and to reach a political solution, considering the gravity of the humanitarian situation.

The Syrian National Coalition is a legitimate interlocutor on the opposition side. We must give it our full support, encourage it to increase its representativeness and inclusiveness, and focus its efforts on a common vision of the political transition so that it can ensure a political solution for the future of Syria and build on the proposals for dialogue made by Mr. Moaz al-Khateeb. President Al-Assad must realize that he cannot prevail on the battlefield or cling to power indefinitely. He cannot claim to represent the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

The conflict has overflowed Syria's borders. No neighbouring country has been spared the security and humanitarian impact of the war in Syria. It is no exaggeration to say that Lebanon and Jordan face an existential threat. We once again express our gratitude to the neighbouring countries for the solidarity with which they continue to host refugees fleeing Syria. In this tragic situation, it is now more important than ever to deliver on the pledges made at the Kuwait City conference on 30 January.

For its part, Luxembourg has fulfilled its commitments and transferred the funds promised to United Nations agencies and programmes. Given the growing needs, our Government decided last week to make an additional contribution of humanitarian aid amounting to €1 million.

I will conclude my remarks by urging the Syrian authorities to stop the cross-border firing, and to fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. We welcome the continued efforts of President Michel Sleiman to preserve the unity and stability of Lebanon. We call on all parties to respect the policy of dissociation adopted by Lebanon. In general, everything must be done to prevent the Syrian conflict from spreading to the regional level.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing this morning, and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their important statements.

The Middle East peace process remains central to events in the wider region. As President Obama said in Jerusalem last month, peace is necessary, just and possible. We welcome the efforts already undertaken by Secretary Kerry and the good will with which they have been received by the parties themselves. The United Kingdom stands ready to mobilize the European Union behind any decisive moves for peace. We share the vision of a world where the Israeli people live in safety and security alongside the Palestinian people, who have a sovereign, viable State of their own.

But if that vision is to be realized, both parties must urgently take steps to rebuild confidence and faith. Events this month present a mixed picture. We welcome reports of an agreement to end the hunger strike by Palestinian prisoner Samer Issawi. However, the United Kingdom remains concerned at the continued widespread use of administrative detention by Israel, particularly given Israel's agreement in May 2012 to limit its use.

The continued use of live fire by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resulted in the deaths of two Palestinian teenagers. On the other side, Molotov cocktails were reportedly used against the IDF during clashes in Tulkarem earlier this month. My Government has called for an investigation into these clashes. There has also been a worrying number of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel over the past month. We condemn such actions. The period of calm since November has been welcome, and we call on all those responsible to respect in full the ceasefire. Lastly, the disturbing trend of settler violence continues. We welcome the investigations launched so far by the Government of Israel, and look forward to all perpetrators of such acts being held to account.

Economic and political stability is key to creating the conditions for peace. As my Foreign Secretary said on 14 April, we regret the news of Mr. Salam Fayyad's resignation as Palestinian Prime Minister. His dedication and energy allowed the Palestinian Authority to take great strides forward in building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State. We must continue to support these institutions. In this context, we welcome Israel's decision of 25 March to resume the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, in line with its international obligations, and we expect this to continue. The United Kingdom remains a strong supporter of and a major financial donor to the Palestinian Authority.

As I said in January's debate (see S/PV.6906), we want 2013 to be a year of peace for the Israelis and Palestinians. This will require Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to show the bold and decisive leadership needed to achieve the lasting peace that the people of the region deserve. We hope that they wil live up to our expectations.

Turning now to Syria, I would like to start by expressing outrage at this week's reports of the killings by Syrian Government forces of hundreds of people, including numerous women and children, in the suburbs of Damascus. As my Foreign Secretary said on Monday, this was yet another reminder of the callous brutality of the Al-Assad regime and the terrible climate of impunity inside Syria.

Our primary and urgent goal remains a political settlement to the conflict. We remain steadfast in our support for the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi, but his room for manoeuvre is shrinking rapidly. The Al-Assad's regime's violence, fueled by the few countries that still support it, is becoming increasingly extreme, from the use of Scud missiles against civilians to the regime's alleged use of chemical weapons. We strongly support the Secretary-General's investigation into all allegations of chemical weapons usage, and urge the Syrian authorities to provide full, unfettered and immediate access to the investigation team.

The catastrophe caused by Al-Assad's brutal regime is rapidly becoming the biggest humanitarian disaster of the twenty-first century. Ten million people — half of Syria's population — are likely to be in need of humanitarian assistance by the end of this year. This includes up to 4 million refugees, whom the United Nations assesses will have fled Syria by the end of 2013. More than 50,000 more people have died since the last draft resolution on Syria was vetoed in July 2012, yet action by the Council remains conspicuous in its absence.

With our partners, the United Kingdom will do everything we can to support the moderate opposition in order to build pressure for a political settlement for a free and democratic Syria. Last weekend in Istanbul, Foreign Ministers from the Friends of Syria core group met with the National Coalition. In their declaration, the Coalition underlined its commitment to a political solution and transition, to guaranteeing the rights and participation of minorities in shaping Syria's future, to

rejecting terrorism and to guaranteeing the safety of chemical weapons, and reiterated its commitment to human rights and international humanitarian law.

In return, the core group of 11 countries reiterated their support for a political solution, agreed to increase significantly their support to the Coalition, and to channel all practical assistance through the Supreme Military Council. They urged the international community to provide more support to countries hosting Syrian refugees.

The United Kingdom commends Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq for their generosity in offering vital sanctuary to those fleeing Syria. Despite the strain on their resources, we urge them to continue to keep their borders open. The devastating impact of the crisis on regional stability underlines the urgent need for a political solution. There can be no doubt that the situation poses a clear and immediate threat to international peace and security.

But neighbouring countries cannot shoulder the refugee burden alone. The United Kingdom has provided $260 million in humanitarian funding, and has delivered fully on the pledges we made at the Kuwait donor conference. We call on all States to do likewise, and immediately translate pledges into actual financial contributions. Doing so will enable the United Nations to scale up its response. We hope that those countries that have yet to make financial commitments will reconsider their position.

The Syrian Government and other parties to the conflict must immediately remove all impediments to the delivery of aid. The situation outlined by Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos to the Council last week (see S/PV.6949) is totally unacceptable. Every truck needing a permit has to be signed off on by two ministers. As many as 10 notes verbales are needed for one aid convoy. The number of approved non-governmental organizations has been reduced from 110 to 29.

All parties in Syria must ensure that humanitarian agencies can deliver life-saving aid effectively, safely, fully and without impediments, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We call on the Syrian Government to urgently facilitate free and unfettered access to all areas of Syria, including to agencies delivering assistance across lines and across borders from neighbouring countries. The Security Council must address this issue urgently.

Finally, those who commit human rights abuses must be held to account. We call on the Syrian authorities to grant the commission of inquiry immediate, full and unfettered access throughout Syria. We strongly support calls for the Security Council to refer Syrian to the International Criminal Court. The United Kingdom remains at the forefront of international efforts to ensure that those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity feel the full weight of international justice.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation with regard to the settlement of the crises in the Middle East remains quite fragile. That was confirmed yet again by the renewed tension in early April when Palestinian fighters from Gaza fired rockets at Israeli territory, and the Israeli Air Force, in response, struck the Gaza Strip. In recent days, the situation in the West Bank deteriorated quite seriously when demonstrations, following the death of a Palestinian detainee, led to clashes with Israeli soldiers. Fortunately, that did not turn into yet another large-scale wave of violence.

That fragile situation, of course, is grounds for our deep concern. We affirm our condemnation of all terrorist manifestations, including the firing of rockets at the south of Israel. We agree that terrorism should be fought mercilessly. However, the use of force against civilians, the violation of human rights and the violation of international humanitarian law are also unacceptable. We restate our conviction of the principle that active assistance is needed to get negotiations and contacts between Israelis and Palestinians to resume. Negotiations must be resumed without preconditions, but on the well-known internationally recognized basis that is spelled out, inter alia, in the statement of the Quartet of international mediators dated 23 September 2011, which was reaffirmed in the statement following the outcome of the Group of Eight Summit in London on 11 April of this year.

Renewed armed confrontation and violence are all deadly for any resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We urge all interested parties to abide by the November 2012 ceasefire agreements between the Israelis and the groups active in Gaza, and on that basis, to move towards a complete lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip. It is important to avoid any steps impeding the search for ways to unblock the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process as a whole. At the same time, the parties must make efforts to restore and

strengthen mutual trust. Especially important in that regard is, in our view, the halting of settlement activities and the resolution of pressing humanitarian issues, including those related to the violation of international humanitarian law with regard to Palestinian detainees and prisoners.

We welcome the agreements achieved leading to the suspension of the hunger strike by a Palestinian detainee. We note the substantial contribution of the departing Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Salam Fayyad, who was working to establish Palestinian statehood. The international community must remember that economic progress simply is not sustainable as a result of continuing occupation and the dangerous impasse around the Middle Eastern settlement.

In regard to the restoration of Palestinian unity, based on the Palestine Liberation Organization platform, that is not only an important factor for success in the negotiations process, but it is also a guarantee for the implementation of possible peace agreements. We are convinced that the relaunch of the negotiations process and transcending the accumulated mistrust can be served by a ministerial meeting of the Quartet, preferably with the involvement of Arab States and with the participation of Israelis and Palestinians.

The events in the Syrian Arab Republic have been unfolding according to a tragic scenario. We decisively condemn the siege by armed opposition fighters of the Aleppo metropolitan bishops of the Greek and Syrian Orthodox Churches. That criminal provocation again confirms the extremists' designs to fan the flames of ethnic and religious division. That was done just two days following the national coalitions in Istanbul, which presented a declaration guaranteeing equal rights for minorities, including religious minorities. That bears witness to nothing more than the fact that either its leaders are simply untrustworthy or they simply do not control the situation. After all, the incident took place along the Turkish border in the so-called liberated territory, which have been receiving generous outside assistance.

We are puzzled by the European Union's decision to allow the import of oil and oil products from those territories, regardless of how hard the authors of the dangerous decision — disregarding the norms of international law and the principle of international sovereignty — try to present their actions as a gesture of support for moderate opposition. There is no need to be a prophet to understand that the money will invariably flow to the strongest armed groups, and that those are the radicals and extremists, including terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaida, namely Jabhat Al-Nusra, which holds a great many of the oil-rich areas outside Syrian Government control. Also alarming is the readiness of number of States to supply illegal groups in Syria with arms, which, after all, risk ending up in the hands of terrorists raging around the territory of the country. If the idea of all-out war to the bitterest of ends, fueled by an aggressive minority of the international community, prevails, that will only further degrade the situation and lead to the growth in terrorist activity, including in neighbouring countries.

In contravention of the objective of initiating political dialogue, a number of allies of the armed opposition have been secretly pushing an extremely harmful draft resolution on Syria in the General Assembly. We also urge Members not to yield to attempts to sidestep, on the basis of various pretexts, the investigation requested by the Syrian authorities regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons near Aleppo on 19 March. Unfortunately, the Secretariat has not shown the requisite consistency and transparency here. The increasing confrontation reaffirms the need for a rapid end to all violence, for the respect of human rights, for restoring the humanitarian situation and for assisting internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring States. It is important to urge international humanitarian organizations and the Syrian Government to maintain the existing level of trust and constructive cooperation, preventing any undermining of that trust through artificial politicization of the humanitarian problem.

The current priority is to force all warring sides to cease all violence, to take a seat at the negotiating table and to reach agreement on the creation of a transitional governing body as provided by the 30 June 2012 Geneva final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex). There is a need to step up the joint efforts to implement the agreements and to avoid being drawn into the dubious campaign to legalize structures that seek to replace the legitimate Government of Syria, especially at the United Nations, the mission of which is after all to be the guardian of international legality.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): We express our thanks to the Under-Secretary-General of Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his briefing this morning.

As we know, the deepening crisis around the conflict in Syria is quite rightly an overriding preoccupation. It should be, but we should of course not also be deterred from the imperative of reinvigorating the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Australia supports all efforts to achieve lasting security for Israel and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State. A durable two-State solution will only be achieved through direct negotiations without preconditions on the basis of the 1967 boundaries and with agreed land swaps. There is a window of opportunity now to re-engage in the peace process, which we simply must not miss.

Australia welcomes United States President Obama's visit to the region and the work being done by United States Secretary of State Kerry. United States leadership is crucial. Prime Minister Netanyahu has confirmed his new Government's commitment to a peaceful two-State solution, to sit down at the negotiating table without preconditions, and to work together to end the conflict. And President Abbas said, the Palestinians were prepared to implement all their commitments and obligations. Those declarations need to be translated quickly into actions by all parties. There are some signs of a more conducive environment for Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage in direct negotiations. We welcome the restraint shown by Israel following recent rocket attacks from Gaza and urge all sides to abide by the November ceasefire. Equally, we welcome the restraint shown by the Palestinian Authority in refraining from taking unilateral action in international forums. Of course, more needs to be done by both sides. In particular, illegal settlement activity directly undermines the prospects for peace and threatens the viability of a Palestinian State.

Continuing donor support to Palestinian economic development is crucial, as is ongoing economic reform by the Palestinian Authority. We regret Prime Minister Fayyad's resignation at this important juncture. We appreciate his role in building the institutional foundation for a future Palestinian State and his efforts in promoting economic development and in driving reform. The Authority must not allow his achievements to be lost, and we must continue to support its efforts. We look to Israel to take immediate steps to ease restrictions and allow the development of a sustainable Palestinian economy. We welcome the resumption of tax transfers, but the clearance of tax revenues needs to be improved on a sustained basis.

We urge the Palestinians to cease all acts of violence against Israel, resolve their internal differences and unite for peace. The ongoing stalemate in the peace process is, of course, not in the interests of Israel, the Palestinians, the region or the international community, and it is well past time, but still possible, for that stalemate to be broken.

Just as the stalemate in the peace process has implications for regional stability, so too does the deepening crisis in Syria, where Palestinians are among those who are suffering from the conflict. There are approximately 500,000 Palestinians in Syria, many now facing displacement and discrimination. Like other Council members, Australia was chastened by last week's briefings on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria by senior United Nations agency heads (see S/PV.6949). The situation in Syria is now clearly at a tipping point. The scale of the humanitarian crisis, its impact on the Syrian people and its destabilizing impact on its neighbours and the region must be of decisive concern to the Council. The cost of further inaction is unbearable for the Syrian people themselves. It is also unbearable for Syria's neighbours, especially Lebanon and Jordan, but also Turkey and Iraq, which are facing destructive pressures from refugee flows, spillovers of violence and cross-border violations.

There were 3,000 refugees per day in January, 5,000 in February, 8,000 in March, and more this month. One in four of the people living in Lebanon are Syrian. One in five of the people living in Jordan are Syrian. As the violence worsens, the effects become exponential and our ability to cope collapses. All parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, must cooperate fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to allow access for these organizations and to remove obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance. As Under-Secretary-General Amos told the Council on 18 April, this needs to include cross-border access. The safety of all humanitarian personnel, medical workers and medical facilities must be ensured.

In the face of this growing humanitarian catastrophe and the direct threat to the security and stability of Syria's neighbours, the Council must act decisively to meet its Charter responsibility to maintain peace and security and to help end the conflict in Syria. Mr. Brahimi has made clear to the Council how it can support his efforts, including through building on the agreement reached by the Action Group in Geneva last June. It is well past time for the Council to respond to

Mr. Brahimi's plea and act firmly so that a political solution can be realized and the crisis brought to an end.

We call on both the Syrian Government and the opposition Syrian National Coalition to engage in meaningful genuine dialogue for an orderly and inclusive transition towards a future Syria that is democratic and exercises the rule of law. Respecting international humanitarian law, reaching out to minority communities, and rejecting and extremist ideology will be instrumental to the future Syria.

We remain seriously concerned over all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and call on the Syrian Government to allow immediate and unhindered access for the Secretary-General's investigation into those allegations. Should they be substantiated, the Council must be prepared to respond swiftly and credibly.

We are now in the third year of the Syrian conflict. The Council simply cannot continue to fail to do what we all know we need to do by beginning to end this catastrophic situation.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing on the recent developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Since the peace process was interrupted in 2010, the Palestinian cause has experienced an historic and decisive turning point, requiring the international community as represented by the Council to intervene to ensure the resumption of the peace process in the region and to expedite progress towards a comprehensive and lasting peace, which is the only guarantee of security and stability for all the peoples of the region.

The visit to the region by President Barack Obama and the initiatives of John Kerry offer a glimmer of hope for a reinvigorated peace process between the Palestinian and the Israelis aimed at achieving the two-State solution. We welcome that visit and the ensuing initiatives. We wish those initiatives every success in helping to reinvigorate the peace process and the negotiations.

In that regard, allow me to recall once again that the Arab side has repreatedly, and most recently at the Arab League Summit held in Doha in March, proven its committment to a lasting and fair peace in the Middle East as a strategic option, and to the principles of the peace process and, in particular, the Arab Peace Initiative, the significance of which has been restated at successive League of Arab States Summits held since 2000.

Experience has shown us that the flexibility shown by the Arabs and the Palestinians has unfortunately been stymied by the ongoing settlement and colonization activities, in particular in the city of Jerusalem. This poses a serious threat, preventing an internationally acceptable solution, as settlement activities have been roundly and consistently condemned and rejected by the international community. This practice infringes upon international law, flouts Security Council resolutions, and prevents the establishment of an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations.

We are all aware that the city of East Jerusalem has been the primary target of the settlement policy, which seeks to alter the geographic, cultural and demographic composition of a city that is of key symbolic significance to all practitioners of holy religions. Its nature cannot be modified. The city cannot be isolated from Palestine.

The Kingdom of Morocco chairs the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We call once again on the international community to shoulder its full historic responsibility to bring to an end to the violations of the sacred nature of holy sites, be they Christian or Muslim, and to ensure respect for the status of the city of Jerusalem as a territory for the coexistence of all holy religions.

The occupied Palestinian territory is facing dire economic circumstances. The further deterioration of the economic situation could endanger the economic gains made to date by the Palestinian Authority, thereby jeopardizing the creation of a Palestinian State. We can only welcome the efforts that have been made to resolve this situation and to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Once again, we call for an end to the blockade that has been imposed on Gaza since 2006. It is a form of collective punishment imposed on more than 1.6 million Palestinian, including more than 1 million refugees. We underscore once again the importance of ensuring that the ceasefire agreed last November is not violated in order to ensure that the lives of innocent civilians are protected. That agreement preserves the security of all parties concerned, without exception.

Moreover, we call upon the Palestinian factions to fully abide by the national reconciliation process in Palestine. The unity of the Palestinian State is a prerequisite for ensuring that the Palestinian interests are upheld in the negotiations and that peace is achieved.

With regard to the issue of Palestinian prisoners, we again call upon Israel to put an end to the tragic fates of thousands of prisoners in its jails, including the sick, those on hunger strike, children and those under administrative detention.

We support the ongoing Palestinian determination to achieve international peace through negotiation. However, the region cannot endure a further failure in the peace process. That is why, today more than ever before, all parties must do their utmost to attain a two-State solution based on a political plan that is clear and through credible negotiations within a specific time frame and in accordance with a well-defined mechanism that will allow for the achievement of a two-State solution based on the 4 June 1967 borders. We hope that 2013 will be the year of a political settlement that will finally enable the Palestinian people to forge their own independent and viable State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel.

As a non-permanent member of the Council, the Kingdom of Morocco shall support all regional and international efforts to revive the peace process and fulfil the hopes of all the peoples of the region for are a Middle East where peace, prosperity and security prevail. Let us do our utmost to ensure that the Israeli Government also demonstrates political willingness to contribute, as it has done in the past, to the creation of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the parameters recognized by all.

We have focused on the Palestinian issue because it lies at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. We fear that the lack of a solution will lead to tragedies for the future of present and coming generations, which would tarnish the Organization.

We shall never forget the ongoing occupation by Israel of the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon and we call upon Israel once again to withdraw from those territories so that a lasting and comprehensive peace may be achieved in the region.

Again, we restate our concern with regard to the situation affecting the brotherly Syrian people and its humanitarian impact. We are convinced that all forms of violence must cease and that the Council must be united in action in order to create an environment conducive to international efforts aimed at putting an end to the killings and to achieve a solution that will meet the aspirations of the Syrian people to freedom and coexistence among all its ethnic and religious components with a view to ensuring respect for Syrian national and territorial unity.

Once again allow me to recall our position, which is based on Lebanon's stability and the unity of its people. We commend the nationalist spirit of responsibility demonstrated by all the groups of Lebanese people in order to uphold the national sovereignty and territorial unity of Lebanon. We are certain that the Lebanese authorities are fully able, through dialogue and wisdom, to resolve pending matters and to reach agreement on the formation of a new Government so that the legislative elections can be held pursuant to Lebanon's Constitution.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): Let me commence by thanking you, Sir, for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his briefing and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

Discussions on the situation in the Middle East bring the whole set of pressing issues to the fore, the solution of which urges long-term dedication and the proper coordination of efforts by the international community. Although the Middle East peace process is definitely among such issues, the long-awaited breakthrough has so far been elusive. It is clear, however, that there is no alternative to peace and negotiations, and the establishment of the groundwork necessary for a credible peace process remains a core priority for the international community.

The latest developments in the region give hope that the situation may begin to move from its current standstill. Azerbaijan commends and supports the diplomatic efforts, particularly those currently undertaken by the United States, to facilitate the process, revive the negotiations and contribute to greater stability in the region. We also underline the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides the regional support for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out, all those involved should work to breathe new life into the peace process, create an environment conducive to the

resumption of negotiations, and establish a credible political horizon for achieving a two-State solution. As we have repeatedly stated, and I would like to stress once again, among the necessary prerequisites for success is the need to ensure that the process is guided by the normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations and by the objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

Needless to say, the achievement of tangible outcomes will be impossible in the absence of strong commitment and dedicated efforts on the part of the parties. Settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a serious obstacle and threat to the peace process and the prospects of achieving a two-State solution. Azerbaijan has consistently condemned and rejected settlement practices, which are illegal under international law and which must cease immediately and unconditionally. It is important that the parties uphold their commitments to the 21 November 2012 ceasefire agreement and refrain from any action that may undermine it.

It is also essential to fully utilize the advantage of cultural diversity by promoting intercommunal dialogue and reconciliation while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic and religious intolerance. We support the ongoing efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas, and express our hope that Palestinian unity will soon be achieved.

Economic and development support for Palestine must be promoted. The humanitarian situation also demands continued international attention and assistance, particularly in order to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian aid throughout the region. It is also critical to put an end to the suffering of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

The urgency for renewed peace efforts is unarguable. The moment of opportunity must not be missed. We would like once again to express our firm conviction that peace, security and prosperity in the Middle East are achievable with greater political will, a stronger commitment and concerted efforts at the regional and international levels.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the Middle East. We thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his very insightful and timely briefing. This is an important time for Palestine and Israel, as well as the entire region. There is a slight tinge of optimism in Mr. Feltman's briefing today.

A flicker of hope appeared after the visits of President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to the region. That tentative beginning, after a long hiatus, should be leveraged to generate the momentum for engagement and a resumption of the peace process.

The Security Council, the Quartet and the regional leaders need to energize the stalled peace process. While different bodies, including the Council, must play their role, it is conventional wisdom that the most decisive impetus for restarting the peace process will come from Israel and Palestine. Working towards sustainable peace is in the interest of both countries. We all know that a leadership role by the United States could persuade the two sides to come to the negotiating table. The process needs benchmarks and deadlines.

In his report pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/19, the Secretary-General reiterates that an end to the occupation and the achievement of a two-State solution are overdue (see A/67/364). He gives us a stark reminder that the year 2013 will be decisive for the peace process. Similar views have been expressed by other regional and world leaders.

However, a two-State solution is rapidly vanishing. Palestine and Israel have not met for the past two and a half years. There is an impasse in the peace process. United States Secretary of State John Kerry warned last week that the window for a two-State solution is shutting after years of failure and that the chance to create a Palestinian State alongside Israel will be lost in one to two years. That is not a gloomy forecast. It is the reality developing on the ground. That warning underlines the sense of urgency for taking concrete steps fast. The two sides need to engage. To do that, they must overcome their persistent scepticism.

The ongoing settlement construction and Israel's plans for new settlements in the E-1 area will hinder the two-State solution by cutting the West Bank into two and destroying the contiguity of the Palestinian State. A one-State reality will be unlawful and unsustainable.

The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, established by the Human Rights Council, pronounced that Israeli settlements symbolized the acute lack of justice experienced by the Palestinian people (see A/64/490,

annex). The settlements deny the people of Palestine the right to self-determination and systematically discriminate against them. The report calls on Israel to comply with article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and to cease all settlement activities without preconditions. We concur. In the interest of both Israel and Palestine, new Israeli settlement plans must be frozen and earlier decisions rescinded.

It is in the interest of Israel itself to work towards a long-term and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ending the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese lands is imperative in that regard. The establishment of a viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

This is also a time for national cohesion within Palestine. The momentum towards building and consolidating the national institutions — interior, police, finance, health-care and education — must be maintained. The flow of financial assistance to Palestine should not slow down. We hope that the recent elections in Israel and the consequent formation of the Government will not be cited as justification for a reduced interest in the resumption of the peace process.

While we continue to push for a long-term solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, urgent measures must be taken to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

First, Gaza has become one big prison. As demanded by resolution 1860 (2009), the blockade on Gaza must be lifted. The heightened restrictions on the movement of people and goods, as well as on fishing limits, must be removed.

Secondly, checkpoints and barriers should be removed from the West Bank because they interfere with mobility and trade. The World Bank report to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Brussels last month provides details of the damage to the Palestinian economy caused by Israeli restrictions. Productivity has halved since the late 1990s and the rate of unemployment has increased many times.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues should be transferred to Ramallah on time.

Fourthly, the inhuman treatment of the Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails should be stopped.

Fifthly, an independent investigation into the death of Arafat Jaradat in Israeli custody is overdue. It must be initiated and be concluded in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

We welcome the agreement between Palestine and Israel on UNESCO involvement in Jerusalem. It is a small but important confidence-building measure.

Let me now turn to Syria. Syria is being decimated before our own eyes. Last week's briefings to the Council revealed that more than 70,000 people have been killed (see S/PV.6949). Syrians are killing Syrians. Foreign terrorist organizations have penetrated into Syrian territory. Summary executions are on the rise. More than 1.3 million Syrians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. Some 7 million people inside Syria need humanitarian attention and assistance. The crisis is assuming more sinister dimensions by the day. Violence and refugees are threatening to embroil the whole region in a wider conflict.

The dictates of realpolitik have immobilized the international community and the Council from making any meaningful intervention. Matters have reached a tipping point. The competing doctrines of militarization and military triumph are choking conduits for dialogue and diplomacy.

The supply of weapons to all sides should be halted. Within the opposition, some entities and outfits are allied to Al-Qaida. Judging by the Libyan experience, such weapons will end up in the hands of terrorists, who could plunge the entire region into a wider crisis.

Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi and the other briefers last week made impassioned pleas to the Council to work towards a political solution. We continue to feel that the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) contains all the right ingredients for political dialogue and dispensation. No other alternative is in sight. Syrians, regional countries and major Powers need to sit with Mr. Brahimi to implement the Geneva communiqué. If there is any fresh thinking, it needs to be developed rapidly and shared with Council members. We earnestly hope that that will happen without delay to stop further carnage in Syria.

We appeal to all sides to continue to trust Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as a mediator. It is also important

that he continue to represent both the Secretary-General and the Arab League.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Although the intervals between meetings where we take up this issue are short, the situation in the Middle East is dynamic enough to provide new developments each time. Thus, in recent months there have been some significant developments that are worthy of comment. I will therefore focus on two topics today — the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Middle East peace process.

Regarding the situation in Syria, the Council's work has been focused on finding a political solution to the conflict that has wracked the country, but despite the many efforts undertaken, we have seen only an increase in the use of violence, both by the Government and by the armed opposition, all of which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, the suffering of millions of people, and a humanitarian crisis of the most serious dimensions. Worse still, the trend shows no signs of improving, as both parties are governed by the logic of military victory over the other, but with very little prospect of achieving that goal. That is why Guatemala continues to strongly believe that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is for both parties to agree to lay down their weapons and negotiate a political solution.

We do not believe that the militarization of the conflict will solve the underlying problems that gave rise to demonstrations in Syria two years ago. Rather, the continuation of the armed struggle will serve only to increase sectarian violence in the country, with the additional risk of spreading it to neighbouring countries. We are also deeply concerned about the emergence of groups within the armed opposition that do not conceal their association with terrorist organizations. We believe that those organizations should not be allowed to take advantage of the existing instability.

We acknowledge the efforts made and the work done to place the various opposition groups in Syria under the same banner, which has so far resulted in the creation of the so-called Syrian National Coalition. However, we remain concerned that the label of "legitimate representative of the Syrian people" is being assigned to the Coalition. Guatemala believes that any transition in Syria should be the product of a Syrian-led process that respects the rights of all parties, and that it is premature to legitimize a group that, like the Government, may not enjoy the broad support of the Syrian population, much less has not been elected democratically. We hope that the function of that group is focused on facilitating interlocutors to advance peaceful negotiations between the parties. On that point, it should be clear that the perpetrators of all crimes committed in Syria, whoever they may be, should be held accountable for their actions. Atrocities of the magnitude of those that have occurred in Syria must not go unpunished.

In addition, Guatemala recognizes the urgent need for the implementation of the humanitarian response plan in Syria. It is unacceptable for the suffering of the Syrian people to continue. In that regard, although we have welcomed the pledges that have been made in the various meetings of donor countries, we believe that it is important that they be made effective. In the same context, it is also indispensable to help all countries that provide humanitarian aid and receive Syrian refugees. The impact that the conflict has had within their borders is quickly consuming those resources, thereby also putting them at risk.

Turning now to the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question, we hope that in the short term both Israel and Palestine can commit themselves to the peace process and work to advance a solution that will lead to a long and lasting peace. In that regard, on 8 April my Government took the decision to recognize Palestine as a State. That decision, based on the principle of the right to self-determination, was made while taking into account the importance of relaunching direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine with the support of the international community and leading to the adoption of a definitive agreement that would allow both parties to live in peace within clearly defined, secure and internationally recognized borders, and that would ensure peaceful coexistence between the two peoples. We hope that the Quartet will resume playing a proactive role in that regard.

Above all, we hope that the parties directly involved will assume the responsibility of working to find viable solutions in the short term. The year 2013 should be marked by the long-delayed resumption of substantive negotiations that will lead to a definitive agreement to resolve all outstanding issues and demands. In that

regard, we believe that the work done by the United States in recent weeks may help steer the process and give the parties the necessary push to launch much-needed dialogue.

Furthermore, we are concerned with respect to the poor state of the Palestinian economy and its negative impact on efforts to build State institutions. We believe it necessary for the international community to reaffirm its support for the Palestinian Authority and encourage countries of the region and emerging economies to fully extend their assistance for the revitalization of the Palestinian economy.

The international community should urge both sides to avoid any act, action or provocation that would hinder the possibility of returning to the negotiating table. We believe that the international community, through the United Nations, is obliged to condemn all violations committed, including those related to safety, and take all necessary actions to put an end to those transgressions. The parties cannot be expected to act responsibly if condemnation for their actions is not forthcoming.

Finally, my delegation believes that it is only through respect for the rights of each of those peoples and a firm commitment to a peaceful solution that both parties will be able to live together in peace, within secure and recognized borders.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like at the outset to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing and for his reflections. I wish also to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, who was here with us in the Chamber until just a few minutes ago, and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their statements.

There is broad agreement among the international community on the fact that the coming months will be decisive in terms of reviving the peace process between Israel and Palestine. There is also a general and shared acknowledgment of the fact that lack of progress or a fresh failure in this undertaking could seriously harm the two-State solution. There is no doubt that the current window of opportunity noted by Mr. Feltman to attain the two-State solution cannot withstand further delay. Time is pressing, and the moment is now. It is urgent because it is possible. The international community believes that it will be possible to breathe new life into the peace process.

We know, however, that the situation on the ground continues to present immense challenges, both long-standing and new. In spite of the repeated calls made by the international community, there are no signs that Israel plans to modify or curb its current settlement policy, which is a real, concrete and tangible obstacle in the way of peace. Nor does it appear that there is to be a just and favourable solution to the problem of Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli custody, which has recently intensified.

In that context, resolving the case of Samer Issawi is pivotal in order to preserve stability in the West Bank. We therefore welcomed the news of a legal decision indicating that Mr. Issawi will now be able to exercise his right of return to Jerusalem in order to complete his sentence there and end his hunger strike.

In addition, the rocket attacks targeting Israeli territory that have occurred in recent weeks deserve to be roundly condemned and demonstrate the fragility of the ceasefire reached last November. In that context, a number of positive signs allow us to believe, with cautious optimism, that there exist real possibilities of overcoming the current impasse. We would like also to acknowledge President Obama's recent trip to the region as well as the rapid follow-up visits paid by Secretary of State Kerry, which undoubtedly are significant events in that regard.

We know that the success of these new undertakings will hinge largely on the extent to which this renewed commitment leads to a credible and comprehensive proposal for the resumption of talks, which must include the actors in the region and beyond who have declared their intention to move forward in a coordinated manner. We believe also that the Security Council can play an important and constructive role in that regard by reaffirming the framework for the peace process and ensuring that the parties do not engage in blameworthy or unlawful conduct, which would exacerbate the situation and undermine mutual trust.

We also welcome the announcement of plans to promote economic and social development in Palestine and all measures aimed at promoting institution-building and the fiscal sustainability of the Palestinian Authority. However, Argentina is convinced, and knows from experience, that the economy, economic development and social cohesion as objectives — not only in the case of Palestine but anywhere in the world — are not separate or independent from political decisions.

That is why the long-term strengthening of the economy and of social cohesion as well as the consolidation of Palestinian institutions will be possible only if there is a political horizon in place for ending the occupation.

Furthermore, the alleviation of the humanitarian situation — in addition to being a legal, social and political imperative — must also be central to actions aimed at creating a favourable environment for the resumption of the talks. In Gaza in particular, is a well-established fact that the extension of fishing limits to 12 nautical miles would have a significant and beneficial impact on the living conditions of more than 3,000 families that depend on fishery resources, and that the lifting of restrictions on the entry of building materials and on the entry and egress of goods would lead to an immediate improvement in the situation of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Those are measures that can and should be taken quickly and in full and must not be delayed, undermined or ignored.

Finally, we welcome the fact that the registration of Palestinian voters has been completed. That is a significant technical step on the road towards establishing a unity Government, and we are also aware that substantial problems remain to be resolved in order to progress towards the necessary reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, in the context of the commitments made by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Finding a rapid solution to the Syrian crisis appears to be an increasingly complex, controversial and difficult process. The signs of openness to dialogue that were noted some three months ago did not develop sufficiently. Indeed, the serious incidents that have occurred in recent weeks on the border between Lebanon and Syria and the allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons suggest that the conflict continues its downward spiral of violence and has now entered a stage that is cause for the utmost concern.

We reiterate our conviction that the only possible solution to the crisis is a political one. In spite of that, rather than witnessing coordinated efforts on the part of those with influence on the parties aimed at convincing them to take a place at the negotiating table, we continue daily to receive reports of the increased military assistance that external actors continue to provide to both sides, thereby enabling them to continue with their mutual destruction and that of the rest of the country.

The continued provision of weapons to both sides in this dispute has been instrumental to the escalating militarization of the conflict. I recall that Argentina urged the Council in January to adopt appropriate and just measures aimed at putting an end to the uninterrupted supply of arms and the subsequent spiral of violence.

The fact that the Security Council was able, a few days ago, to speak unanimously on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.6949) shows not only that we can end the status quo of intolerable silence, but also that the solution in Syria is and must be a political one. Similarly, the Security Council must overcome its differences, which is not only a political decision but also a moral duty.

We have made clear that we support and fully endorse the principles outlined by Special Representative Brahimi. We did so not only last January but also reaffirmed that view only a few days ago, both our confidence in Joint Special Representative Brahimi and the criteria of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). I hope that that will not be a mere mechanical or rhetorical repetition, but a decision by us as a Council to contribute to a political solution for our brothers and sisters in Syria through a frank and inclusive dialogue, which our fellow delegations must not impede, hamper or prevent from taking place.

Finally, with regard to Lebanon, we certainly remain concerned at the impact of the Syrian crisis on that country. As High Commissioner Guterres said in this Chamber, the crisis has become an existential threat to the survival of many and to the future prospects of others in Lebanon. We support once again the policy of disassociation adopted by the Government of Lebanon and reiterate how important it is that all political sectors in Lebanon respect that policy as a key element for preserving the stability of the country.

Despite the change and upheaval rippling across the Middle East, we must not lose sight of the central importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in our deliberations on peace in the region. Peace and security in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, have been on the agenda of the United Nations almost since the very inception of the Organization. Time, hope, resources and efforts of all kinds have been devoted, at best, to providing a space to manage the crisis, but not to resolving it.

In that regard, we have a normative framework with the criteria and principles for a lasting solution, which enjoy broad international acceptance. Together we must continue to consider what our shortcomings have been and how we can implement that framework for the benefit not only of the parties, Palestine and Israel, but also the region and the world.

We hope that the strong support of the international community for the two-State solution will give rise to concrete efforts on the part of both sides, and of relevant international actors, aimed at relaunching the peace process without delay and at creating an environment conducive to the resumption of direct negotiations in order to attain a comprehensive solution based on a vision of the region whereby the two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side, within secure and recognized borders. Argentina will continue to actively support all initiatives towards that end.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

My country will take the opportunity provided by this debate to address the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the situations in Syria and Lebanon.

Today's consideration of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, offers yet another occasion to my delegation not only to express its profound concern at the ongoing events in the region, but also to draw the attention of the international community, and especially the Security Council, to the urgent need to work to urge all parties to overcome the obstacles blocking the path to peace and security in the region.

It is indeed time for the Palestinian and Israeli parties to decide to genuinely embrace rapprochement. We believe that the status quo has gone on for too long and that the two parties should resolve to make good on their commitments to achieve a negotiated solution for the creation of two States, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must now take steps to strengthen mutual trust.

In that regard, we welcome the reopening on 19 April of the Kerem Shalom crossing, reserved for goods and the humanitarian aid delivery to the Gaza Strip. We urge the Israeli authorities to do more by raising the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. We also urge them to release Palestinian prisoners and detainees who have not been charged but are still currently in Israeli prisons. We also believe that the time has come to end the expansion of settlements.

At the same time, we once again urge Hamas to take all steps possible to control the armed groups that refuse to renounce violence and whose acts undermine the trust that otherwise could have been strengthened between that movement and Israel since the ceasefire agreement was signed in November 2012.

The issue of Palestinian refugees living in camps remains a source of major concern for my country. The United Nations is making enormous efforts to assist those thousands of persons through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That is why my country condemns the attacks aimed at the UNRWA office site by the demonstrators in Gaza on 4 April. We believe that nothing could justify such acts of violence against humanitarian personnel and United Nations installations trying to assist refugees. The authorities in Gaza should provide the guarantees needed to allow the Office to continue its operations peacefully and free of impediments.

It cannot be overemphasized that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the two parties. Those negotiations, interrupted now almost three years ago, must absolutely be resumed. In that regard, Togo would like to call on the international community, and more specifically on the Security Council and the Quartet, to exert pressure of all kinds on the two parties to agree on a renewed timeline for the resumption of negotiations. We are convinced that dialogue is the only way to a lasting settlement of the conflict.

In this regard, my country reaffirms the call it issued at the debate in January (see S/PV.6906) for the reactivation of the Arab Peace Plan, the Madrid principles and the road map, with the support of the States Members of the United Nations that have any influence with either party. We therefore welcome the recent decision of the Arab League to resume work to revive the peace process. The creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living alongside Israel in peace and security within recognized borders, remains the goal that all our efforts should contribute

to achieve. In that respect, we welcome and support all initiatives, in particular those recently undertaken by the United States of America, that could contribute to that objective.

In Syria, the prevailing political and military situation has plunged the international community into growing uncertainty about a future solution to the crisis. The destruction of the country's infrastructure, the unbridled pursuit of killings, massive violations of human rights, and the mass movement of displaced persons and refugees lead us to believe that the country is self-destructing even as the whole world watches without being able to act to end this tragedy. Given such a state of affairs, an end to the war is indubitably the solution.

In this respect, Togo welcomes the Security Council's 18 April call on the parties to end the violence in all its forms and to start negotiations for a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). The Security Council must build on the unity it attained on 18 April 18 to compel the parties to sign a ceasefire that would open the way to the national dialogue that alone can end the conflict.

With respect to Lebanon, my country is concerned not only about the ongoing insecurity on its border with Syria, but also and especially by the scale of its humanitarian needs. Beyond the security implications of the Syrian war, which has been manifest in clashes between factions and supporters of each party to the conflict, which my country condemns, the issue of Syrian refugees, who are estimated at more than 1.2 million and whose numbers are increasing every day, fuels our concerns. Indeed, the burden of these refugees is felt at all levels of life in Lebanon, and it is to be feared that this situation may jeopardize peace and stability in that country.

Togo again calls on the international community and donor countries to further support the Lebanese Government in addressing both the humanitarian needs of the refugees and the growing insecurity in the host cities. We reiterate our warm thanks to the donor countries for the efforts they have undertaken to that end.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his detailed briefing. Entering the second quarter of the year, the Middle East peace process seems to be at the fork of two diverging roads. There must have been a road not taken much fairer than the one Israel and Palestine have taken thus far. The choice both sides make today will make all the difference. Recently, we have witnessed a faint glimmer of hope that allows for cautious optimism, but there also exist disappointing elements. Israel and Palestine should deal with the unforeseen incidents occurring on a daily basis. No matter how serious these incidents are, however, both parties should maintain the farsighted perspective of a negotiated resolution of all issues.

Following the death of a Palestinian detainee on 2 April, protests broke out, and during the clashes two young Palestinians died. This is an unfortunate vicious cycle that needs to be broken. My delegation condemns the rocket attacks from Gaza. Both parties must abide by the ceasefire agreed to in November. In this regard, we commend the government of Israel for reopening the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The continuing plight of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip is unacceptable; at the same time, cannot justify hostility towards humanitarian facilities and staff. The violent acts of protestors against a United Nations food distribution centre are deplorable. The safety and security of United Nations humanitarian property and staff must be guaranteed regardless of the situation.

In terms of the long-term perspective, my delegation takes note of three particular developments. First, it is encouraging that the United States Government is making efforts to engage both sides, as well as neighbouring countries, through President Obama's and Secretary Kerry's visits to the region. We expect that this shuttle diplomacy will lead to an atmosphere conducive to the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine. We welcome the reported agreement to seek ways to assist the economic development of Palestine. Meaningful progress on the economic track will, we hope, create positive momentum in breaking the political stalemate.

Secondly, my delegation is concerned that Israel's demolition activity has recently resumed in Area C. We urge the Government of Israel to forego further construction of settlements. We welcome the agreement between Israel and Palestine regarding UNESCO's activity in the Old City of Jerusalem. We hope that this small progress will lead to a more meaningful trust-building going forward.

Thirdly, the resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority has overshadowed uncertainties on the future of the Palestinian Authority,

reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and the prospects of the peace process. My delegation hopes that, under the leadership of President Abbas, a capable successor will be appointed soon.

In order for all these variables to converge on the common goal of lasting peace and security in the Middle East, it is imperative that both Israel and Palestine refrain from initiating provocative acts and demonstrate a spirit of compromise. We hope that the Quartet will resume its work and, combined with the mediation efforts of the United States, have a synergic effect.

The situation in Lebanon requires our continued attention. The resignation of Prime Minister Mikati could increase the unpredictability of the domestic political scene. With the Syrian crisis at its doorstep, the Government's dissociation policy needs to be observed by all parties in order to prevent the inflammation of sectarian tensions within Lebanon. The influx of refugees has increased Lebanon's population by more than 10 per cent. With the Syrian crisis on the verge of spilling across its borders, all political players should unite to secure Lebanon's political sovereignty and territorial integrity at this critical juncture.

The civil war in Syria is by far the most dangerous crisis in terms of the scale of its casualties and the scope of its impact. The crisis has entered its third year, resulting in well over 70,000 deaths, 4.5 million internally displaced persons and 1.3 million refugees. Last week, five United Nations humanitarian agency heads made a joint statement warning that the humanitarian response has reached the limits of its capacity. Their statements demonstrated the urgency of a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Particularly heartbreaking is the suffering of the most vulnerable groups, especially women and children. The international community should continue to attend to their suffering and provide support. The Republic of Korea believes that all perpetrators of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be held accountable. My delegation urges the parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and embark upon efforts towards a political solution. We also invite countries that have not yet done so to provide their support for referring the case to the International Criminal Court.

It is imperative that the international community rally to support the Syrian people. Their ongoing plight foreshadows a bleak future for the entire nation. Therefore, it is also important to prepare for a future reconstruction process in Syria. In that regard, I wish to inform the Council that the Government of the Republic of Korea is planning in June to host the third meeting of the working group on economic recovery and development of the Group of Friends of Syria. To that end, we are now consulting with Germany and the United Arab Emirates, the co-chairs of the working group.

It is with a heavy heart that I must accept that the situation in Syria has not improved since the Security Council held its open debate three months ago (see S/PV.6906). On the contrary, it has begun to deteriorate on an exponential scale. As members of the Security Council, we share a heavy sense of responsibility. I hope that the Council will break the current deadlock and make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of that tragic conflict.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I have also listened carefully to the statements made by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The core and root causes of the Middle East questions remain the Palestinian issue, to which dialogue and negotiation represent the only viable solution. China is concerned about the long-term stagnation of the peace talks. Recently, the international community has stepped up efforts to promote peace, and both parties have expressed their willingness to resume peace talks. China welcomes those developments and hopes that both sides will seize opportunities, overcome obstacles, bridge their differences, take measures to build mutual trust and restart negotiations as soon as possible.

China is open to all initiatives conducive to bridging the differences between the two parties and restarting dialogue and negotiations. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo accords, and we hope that it will not be another futile year for the peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

Israeli settlement activities are the direct cause of the stagnation of the peace talks and the major obstacle to their resumption. Israel should take the initiative by ending its settlement activities in the occupied territories and addressing the issue of Palestinian detainees in order to create the necessary conditions for

the restoration of mutual trust and an early resumption of the peace talks.

Currently, the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, remains grave. The relevant United Nations resolutions must be effectively implemented, and we hope that Israel will lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip as soon as possible and alleviate the humanitarian situation there. We call on the Quartet to take concrete measures to promote the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel, while the Security Council also needs to play a bigger role in promoting a settlement of the issue.

China continues to believe that Palestine and Israel should settle their disputes through political dialogue, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East road map. The ultimate goal is to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders and living side by side with Israel in peace.

China firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinians for the restoration of their legitimate national rights, and has been promoting the peace talks through its own means. The Chinese special envoy on the Middle East issue, Mr. Wu Sike, will visit Palestine and Israel from 25 to 30 April to exchange views with both sides on the latest developments in the peace process in the Middle East and to carry out peace facilitation work.

China stands ready to work with the international community to play a constructive role for the early realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A political solution is the only viable way to resolve the Syrian issue. Currently, the Syrian issue is at a critical stage. We urge the parties concerned in Syria, on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex), to achieve a ceasefire and end hostilities as soon as possible, launch a political dialogue and implement a Syrian-led political transition process. The international community should also step up mediation efforts in order to play a positive and constructive role in the just, peaceful and proper settlement of the Syrian issue.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Rwanda.

I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his informative and insightful briefing on the current situation in the Middle East. I also thank Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, and Mr. Ron Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, for joining us today.

In the Security Council, we hold an open debate every quarter to examine the progress made and the bottlenecks in moving forward, and to keep track of the Middle East peace process. We last gathered here on 23 January (see S/PV.6906) to examine the stalemate in the Middle East peace process, and specifically in the implementation of the two-State solution. Today, we have come here to review what we have achieved or not, and the way forward.

A sustainable solution for the Middle East peace process must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should play their role in complete commitment to those objectives and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Our role in the Council is to make sure that deliberations and decisions are translated into action.

On 20 March, President Obama visited Israel and Palestine. That was a positive step in the revival of the Middle East peace process. It is on that note that we express our appreciation to the Government of the United States for that initiative, and we hope that the effort will bear concrete results. We further commend President Obama's efforts for the reconciliation of Turkey and Israel. Israeli/Turkish reconciliation could improve regional coordination in the Middle East peace process and prevent the crisis of the Syrian civil war from spreading.

Rwanda, like the African Union, is of the view that a two-State solution is the only viable resolution for both nations. That involves the creation of a Palestinian State that is independent and sovereign, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. We therefore encourage both sides to support and implement confidence-building measures that will allow the peace process to move forward. Any action that may undermine the two-State solution should be avoided. We reiterate our view that Israel should be

fully recognized by its regional partners and should live in security within its borders. At the same time, the Palestinians' aspiration to have their own State that is political independent and economically viable must be fulfilled.

We urge all parties to consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza that was brokered by the Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsy. Rwanda expresses its concern over the deteriorating security in the West Bank. We call on all sides to avoid public statements that could further fuel the tensions.

We continue to support the Quartet in its mediation efforts, but deplore the current diplomatic impasse. We therefore call on the Quartet and those countries that have influence on both parties to redouble their efforts to bring to the table new initiatives for peace in the Middle East.

Turning to Syria, let me clearly state that the situation is unbearable. The humanitarian situation is worsening day by day with the deaths of thousands of people, with refugee numbers reaching over 1 million and with over 3 million internally displaced persons. This is a stain on the world's conscience. The international community has the duty to address the situation. Mr. Brahimi reminded the Council that it is the last court of appeal when international peace is at risk, and it is time to translate our deliberations and decisions into actions.

Based on the recent report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and mass destruction have been committed. There are reported accounts of murder, arbitrary detentions, sexual violence and torture committed by the parties involved, and now we have heard allegations of the possible use of chemical weapons.

As a member of the Security Council, Rwanda will work with our colleagues to encourage a strong and unified response to bring about a process of political transition in Syria. Military intervention in Syria will only continue to exacerbate the killing and violence and the emergence of Al-Qaida. In that context, we continue to support the work of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his efforts to bring a political solution to the conflict. And we believe that the Arab League should indeed assume a role in that solution.

In seeking to prevent the escalation of the Syrian conflict into neighbouring countries, we hope that Lebanon will soon be able to control its borders in order to avert clashes between the Syrian rebels and the Hizbullah militants, which put civilians' lives at risk in border areas. We also call upon the Lebanese Government to take action against Hizbullah's aggressions and to do everything within its means to ensure the safety of civilians on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

In conclusion, the stalemate in the Middle East is not impossible to resolve, but we need realistic solutions based on international principles and norms. That will require all influential stakeholders to display strong political will by considering and reinforcing the needs of the peoples and nations of the region. It goes without saying that the Security Council must play its intended role by fulfilling its mandate to seek and enforce a sustainable solution to the conflicts in the Middle East as far as returning credibility. We therefore call on everyone to take responsibility.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

There are still a number of speakers remaining inscribed on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.